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ABSTRACT

To examine available research, largely done after 1965, and identify factors influencing academic performance of Amish students in public schools, particularly in Indiana, material was divided into four annotated bibliographic sections: Amish definition of education (three items); Amish attitudes toward education, as reflected in their society (eight items); Amish educational methods (six items); educational achievement of Amish students (five items). Conclusions were: education is extremely important to the Amish, but must have practical applications; Amish prefer to educate their children in their own parochial schools, using Amish teachers who teach the 3 R's and uphold Christian morals; if parochial schools are unavailable, Amish parents will send children to public schools and attempt to counteract worldly influence. Research also indicated that: Amish schools are successful by worldly standards; although curriculum is less varied than in public schools, Amish pupils perform at the same level as public school peers; lack of interest in arts and sciences seems encouraged by Amish society; bilingualism affects academic achievement of Amish pupils negatively, but the handicap diminishes as education progresses. Recommendations for public schools are: primary grade language arts programs should accelerate vocabulary and verbal skills; teachers should familiarize themselves with Amish culture and stress practical applications of skills taught to Amish pupils. (MH)

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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE TEACHING OF AMISH STUDENTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

Amish pupils are present in many of the public schools in Northern Indiana and in Pennsylvania. The Amish are also represented in school systems in Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and New York. (Hostetler and Huntington 1971) Even though they are not a large minority group, educators must be aware of the different social and academic needs of these pupils in order to help them meet their educational goals.

In order to teach and counsel Amish students effectively, teachers and administrators must have some background knowledge of Amish society and culture. (Wittmer and Moser 1974) A brief description of the Amish follows.

The Amish sect began in seventeenth century Europe. It is a Protestant religion that evolved from the Anabaptists of Switzerland, Alsace, and the Netherlands. In its beginnings the Amish faith was closely related to the Mennonite religion but some basic theological differences did exist and caused a rift between the two groups. (Hostetler 1980)

Buchanan, Hostetler, and Wittmer all agree that the Amish faith and lifestyle are inseparable. Amish society is organized on the precept of separation from the world. They believe that they are God's chosen people. This separatism is illustrated in the Amish refusal of modern conveniences such as motor vehicles, electricity, telephones, motorized

farm machinery, modern clothing, and hairstyles. The Amish follow the Biblical dictate "Be ye a peculiar people." (Wittmer 1971)

Intrinsic to the Amish faith is their closeness to the soil and their choice of farming as the most prevalent occupation. The work chosen by Amish males if they are unable to farm is farm related. Martineau and MacQueen (1977) reported that jobs such as harness making and woodworking are on the increase.

Most Amish feel that the rural life keeps them more secluded from the world and its influences. The isolation helps foster family and social ties within the sect. (Hostetler 1980)

The Amish are known for their large families. Children are welcomed as a blessing from God to be reared in a loving Christian manner. (Newcomb 1980 a.) It is the responsibility of the family to teach their children about God by setting a good example. (Stoll 1976)

Formal education is important to the Amish because it will enable their children to function in the non-Amish society when necessary. Reading is especially important to the Amish because it will enable the children to study the Bible. Arithmetic is also important because it is necessary to take care of farm and household business. However, knowledge of the sciences and high learning are considered foolishness and not necessary to Amish life. (Hostetler 1980)

The Amish beliefs affect the education of their children to a great extent. This study will attempt to illustrate some of the factors that are pertinent to the instruction of Amish pupils in the public elementary and junior high schools.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over 10,000 Amish children are enrolled in Indiana public schools. (Wittmer 1971) Even though the Amish are a minority group their educational needs must be met.

Amish pupils beginning school initially encounter some learning problems due to their inexperience with the English language and the "English" (non-Amish) culture. (Newcomb 1980 b.) However, by the end of the elementary school years the pupils sometimes surpass their English speaking classmates.

Despite their eagerness to learn, many Amish pupils disregard certain areas of instruction as if certain subjects are unnecessary. The cause for this behavior may be reflected in the Amish culture.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine available research that would identify factors that influence academic performance of Amish students in the public schools.

It was hoped that by identifying the areas affecting academic achievement strategies could be developed to insure a higher rate of academic success.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The annotations that follow are divided into four major subject areas. There is some overlap between the major areas.

The first section briefly defines the Amish definition of Education. The second section illustrates some cultural attitudes toward education reflected in the Amish society. The final sections discuss educational methods used by the Amish and research of educational achievement of the Amish.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the precepts of Amish society is the avoidance of outsiders, the lack of acceptance of worldly ideas, and their limited contact with the world outside their society. (Hostetler 1980) Comparatively speaking, very little specific educational research has been done with the Amish. As a result of this situation, much of the available research reported is dated. The researcher tried to limit reported research to that done after 1965. Exceptions to this rule are the definition of education stated by Bontreger and Engle's research on attitudes among Amish children.

Two possible sources reporting educational achievement of Amish pupils have been omitted from this study. "Old Order Amish Pupil Achievement in Work Study Skills" and "Old Order Amish Pupils, Culture, and Mathematics Achievement" by Marlow Ediger are to be published in Research in Education in

the July 1983 edition. No research has been reported on attitudinal changes within Amish pupils toward specific content areas such as science, biology, art, and music education. Due to constraints of time, no research data could be collected to document this change. It is hoped that research will be done in this area in the future.

ANNOTATIONS

AMISH DEFINITION OF EDUCATION

Bontrager, John, "The Challenge Before Us," in Anabaptist Conceptions of Child Nurture and Schooling, pp. 107-108, edited by John A. Hostetler, Temple University College of Liberal Arts, Philadelphia, 1969.

Bontrager discussed the change in the style of education proposed by the new consolidated public elementary school. In addition to objecting to the cost of the new facilities, he warned the simple Amish way of life might disappear if the children were allowed to attend the modern school. He stated over 50% of Westview School Corporation's pupils were Amish so this decision was of prime importance. He called for the establishment of more Amish schools saying that it would insure development of Christian morals without secular influence.

Bontreger, Eli J. "What is a Good Education?" in Anabaptist Conceptions of Child Nurture and Schooling, p.88, edited by John A. Hostetler, Temple University College of Liberal Arts, Philadelphia, 1969.

Bontreger, an Amish bishop, stated that education isn't just "book learning" or knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but knowledge and skills that can be put to practical use. He states that knowledge enables the learner to distinguish what is useful and uplifting. A good education requires "discipline of character and intellect, which will be an aid in living a useful life."

Hostetler, John A. Anabaptist Conception of Child Nurture and Schooling: A Collection of Source Materials Used by the Old Order Amish, Temple University of the Commenwealth System of Higher Education, Philadelphia, 1968, 124 pp.

Hostetler collected articles stating the responsibilities and duties of Amish parents to their children. All of the articles were written by qualified Amish men. Many of the authors were Amish ministers. The articles compiled reflect the importance of education to the Amish.

CULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION

Stoll, Joseph, Child Training, Pathway Publishing Corporation, Aylmer, Ontario, 1976, 317 pp.

Stoll has written fictional short stories to illustrate conflicts that arise in child rearing. Obedience to the parents is the most important quality that parents can teach their children states Stoll. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is his basic philosophy. He believes that a child's will must be broken to make him obedient to his parents and later to God. Although he warns against severe punishment, he believes parents can expect compliance with their demands in children as young as six months. The last section of the book discusses common child rearing problems and solutions sent in by readers of Family Life, an Amish magazine.

Stoll, Joseph, The Challenge of the Child, Pathway Publishing Corporation, Aylmer, Ontario, 1967, 270 pp.

A selection of articles written by Amish parents and teachers on the meaning of education, methods of teaching, tips for the teacher, and inspirational articles about the responsibilities of scholars, parents, and teachers. The selections were compiled from The Blackboard Bulletin, an Amish teacher's magazine from 1957--1966.

Hostetler, John A. Amish Society, Third Edition, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1980, 384 pp.

Hostetler has researched Amish society thoroughly. The Amish faith and its tenets from its beginning in 17th century Europe are outlined especially the Schleitheim Articles, the basic guidelines of the Amish life today. The organization of church groups and religious ceremonies are explained. Courtship customs and family life are documented in detail. The role of the parents as the most influential teacher and the secondary role of the school teacher are clearly explained. The idea of a good education being an education that allows the child to function well in Amish society is explained.

Hostetler was reared in an Amish family but chose not to be baptized and join the church when he reached the age of 18.

Buchanan, Frederick S. "Secular Schoolmen and Amish Aims," School and Society 97:104-106, February, 1969.

Buchanan explained the reason for Amish conflicts with state officials regarding school mandates. He felt the major cause of conflict was the ignorance of school officials to Amish values and educational objectives. He stated there is no division between life and religion to the Amish. Work, education, and faith are all interwoven. The lack of religion in public school curriculum is not an issue with the Amish. The Amish feel religious training is the responsibility of the family. The major issue is the fear of losing their children to the English way of life because of daily exposure to middle class values in the classroom.

Engle, T.L. "Attitude Differences Between Amish and Non-Amish Children Attending the Same School," The Journal of Educational Psychology, 34:206-214, 1943.

This study measured attitudes in Amish and non-Amish students by means of a personality inventory. Grades five through eight were surveyed and control groups were approximate in size. Results showed Amish children were more submissive and introverted than non-Amish children but both groups were well adjusted emotionally. The study suggested additional research was needed.

Martineau, William H., and MacQueen, Rhonda Sayres, "Occupational Differentiation Among the Old Order Amish," Rural Sociology 42:383-397, Fall, 1977.

The change from farm and farming businesses to non-farm employment among the Old Order Amish in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is causing a change in the economic base of the Amish. The cost of land and its scarcity and the industrial growth of the area has caused occupational change to jobs supplying major consumer needs of the Amish such as harness making and woodworking. Occupational areas also showing growth are non-traditional categories such as machinists, mechanics, and factory employment. The authors believe the Amish will change with the economic times but this will not cause them to disintegrate. Kinship ties and similar values will keep the community together.

Wittmer, Joe, "The Amish and The Supreme Court," Phi Delta Kappan, 54:1, 50-52, September, 1972.

Wittmer dealt with the May 15, 1972, United States Supreme Court Decision exempting Amish children from state laws compelling them to continue their schooling beyond the eighth grade. The court agreed that compulsory, formal education beyond the eighth grade would endanger free exercise of the Amish religious beliefs. Amish parents insisted that they have the right to protect their children from undesirable influences and values that are contrary to their way of life.

Newcomb, Thomas, Getting Ready for School: A Booklet Prepared for Amish and Mennonite Parents, The Author, Garrettsville, Ohio, 1980, 6 pp. (9108 S.R. 305, Garrettsville, Ohio, 44231).

This booklet was written to help Amish and Mennonite parents prepare their children for school. Newcomb stresses that parents make sure their children can understand simple English commands and sentences. The author also states that the children should be able to speak in sentences and recommended enlarging the use of spoken English vocabulary in the home. He stated that "Schools and knowledge are ordained of God. A parent has a very important responsibility in the education of their children. It is best to examine ones own convictions and church standards when choosing a school. Both parochial and public schools have strong points and faults." (p. 5)

METHODS OF EDUCATION

Wittmer, Joe, "The Amish Schools Today," School and Society 99:227-230, April, 1971.

Wittmer detailed the August, 1967 agreement between the Amish and Indiana state school officials. The eight member Amish State Executive Committee agreed to a school calendar of 167 days between August 15 and May 10th. The attendance record requirement is 97% of enrolled pupils with makeup days required if necessary. Reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic are required for both semesters with one semester each for both geography and history. All of these subjects are to be taught in English. The teaching of German is optional. No science, art, physical education or shop courses are offered. Textbooks must be approved by the Amish State Executive Committee. After graduation from eighth grade and until age 16, Amish pupils must attend a vocational division for 5 hours a week and work on independent projects for 4 hours daily. The vocational project is teacher supervised and must be done in a home or farm related area. Parents are required to help supervise this project and must sign any reports turned in by the pupil.

Wittmer, Joe, and Moser, Arnold, "Counseling the Old Amish Child," Elementary School Guidance 8:263-270, May, 1974.

Counseling the Old Amish child requires empathy and a knowledge of Amish culture. Wittmer and Moser warned counselors of several factors that should be considered. Because of different cultural values, counselors should not stress self-concept and pride in pupils' achievements. Both of these concepts are discouraged in Amish culture. Counselors must recognize that Amish children are uninterested in career exploration. They should also note that Amish pupils purposely keep some social distance from non-Amish classmates. Amish parents may also have warned their children not to be swayed by advice and interest of teachers and counselors regarding family and church matters.

Huntington, Gertrude Enders, "Age Grading and Socialization Patterns in the Traditional Amish Culture," Child Socialization Conference, pp. 27-39, edited by John A. Hochstetler, Temple University College of Liberal Arts, Philadelphia, 1969.

Amish parents have a choice of educating their children in worldly public schools and attempting to counteract the secular influences or of establishing parochial schools. Huntington states the focus of education is different in each type school. Even though both teach the 3 R's, public schools stress individual achievement over group efforts, varied subject matter, and speed in learning sometimes at the expense of accuracy. Public school classes are also arranged in age group levels. Amish schools stress the importance of group efforts, a more restrictive curriculum, accuracy in learning factual material, and less defined age groups. Huntington concludes the biggest drawback to a public school education to the Amish is that by attending a public school their children will become attracted to the non-Amish way of life.

Stoll, Joseph, Who Shall Educate Our Children? Pathway Publishing Corporation, Aylmer, Ontario, 1965, pp. 21-46.

Stoll urged Amish parents to remove their children from public schools and establish or enroll them in Amish parochial schools. He declared the state operated public schools do not teach Christian values or religion and that non-Amish students and teachers are not a proper influence on Amish children. Furthermore, the public schools are secularly oriented with lower moral standards and have a curriculum that stresses sciences, sports, and extra-curricular activities.

Willems, Ken, The Inadequacies of the Present Educational System in Relating to the Amish, term paper, Goshen, Indiana, 1967.

Willems stated living in an Amish sub-culture affects the Amish student's ability to learn under the present educational system to such a negative degree that the education that is now forced upon them is worthless. He believed that Amish and English do not accept each other because of visible differences and the fact that the Amish view education as evil. He recommended separate classes for the Amish in practical skills such as home economics and industrial arts.

Keefer, Daryle E. The Education of the Amish Children in Lagrange County, Indiana, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, 1969.

Dr. Keefer's report dealt specifically with the education given to Amish school children in Lagrange County. Attitudes of the Amish regarding a satisfactory education, their use of parochial one-room schools, curriculum, management and daily schedules, Amish teacher credentials, and the student drop-out rates are discussed. Keefer stated that the Amish support a public school education as long as it is rural in nature and does not depart much from the Amish life pattern. They value reading because it helps them understand the Bible. Parents believe the real education happens at home.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF AMISH STUDENTS

Redekop, Calvin, "An Interpretation of Amish Achievement Scores: the Culturally Different Hypothesis," in Child Socialization Conference, pp.125-135, edited by John A. Hochstetler, Temple University College of Liberal Arts, Philadelphia, 1969.

Redekop researched the degree of socialization achieved by Amish pupils by using Stanford Achievement Test scores as an indicator. Research was focused on grades 1-8, comparing Amish with non-Amish on the achievement tests in word meaning, spelling, vocabulary and language, word study skills, arithmetic computation, arithmetic conceptualization, arithmetic application, science, and social science. In all areas of testing the Amish scored as well as the non-Amish and in the area of vocabulary and language achievement, their scores were slightly higher than the non-Amish. Redekop felt that perhaps the Amish are not a culturally different minority group after all.

Entwisle, Doris R. Semantic Systems of Minority Groups, Educational Resources Information Center, Ed 030 106, The Johns Hopkins University, Report #43, June, 1969, 15 pp.

Entwisle studied semantic systems of three groups of children searching for a link between environment and development of semantic systems. Since the building of a child's semantic structure is environmentally dependent, it was expected that the groups studied--black and white inner city children, suburban white students in Maryland, and Old Order Amish children in Maryland. The data yielded surprising results. In spite of a bilingual handicap which could slow semantic development, the Amish pupils' semantic development "does not depart drastically from the rates shown for suburban children" and surpasses that of black and white inner city children. (p.10)

Newcomb, Thomas, Factors and Considerations When Testing and Evaluating Pennsylvania Dutch Speaking Children, The Author, Garrettsville, Ohio, 1980, 4pp. (9108 S.R. 305, Garrettsville, Ohio, 44231.)

Newcomb's tips for testing and evaluating Pennsylvania Dutch pupils advise teachers and administrators to understand that the pupils are from a culturally different background. Newcomb stated that testing rules and procedures should be given in both English and Pennsylvania Dutch to facilitate understanding. He also reminded educators that the Pennsylvania Dutch child entering school "may have little or no experience with the English language." (p.3)

Hostetler, John A., and Huntington, Gertrude Enders, Children in Amish Society: Socialization and Community Education, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1971, pp.80-96.

Hostetler and Huntington tested Amish elementary pupils in the areas that are important to Amish culture namely reading, writing, and arithmetic. Eighth grade Amish pupils were given the SRA Tests of Educational Ability in the areas of language, reasoning, and quantitative ability. The average composite score for the Amish was 96.7 and the average composite score for the non-Amish 99.5. This difference was not statistically significant although the Amish pupils were significantly lower (P .01) than the control group in the language portion. Amish pupils scored slightly higher in areas of reasoning and quantitative ability.

Miller, Wayne Edgar, A Study of Amish Academic Achievement, University of Michigan, 1969, 204pp. (Thesis, Ph.D.)

Results indicated that Amish students "do reasonably well on standardized tests when compared with other pupils in an agricultural setting." (p.155) Amish students did as well as non-Amish in the areas of reading comprehension and use of reference materials but were behind non-Amish students in vocabulary by a significant degree, possibly because of their bilingualism and limited experience. In the areas of spelling, word usage, and arithmetic problem solving, Amish students surpassed their non-Amish peers.

SUMMARY

Education is of supreme importance to the Amish for economic and religious survival. Besides maintaining and acculturating their children to the Amish society, education is the most important responsibility of the family. Hostetler (1980) stated that the primary function of the family is to educate the children in Amish beliefs and enable them to function in Amish society. Bontreger warned the Amish that education is not just the memorization of facts but a guide to knowledge which is necessary and spiritually rewarding. Stoll (1976) reminded parents of their duty to their children. He insisted children must be obedient to the wishes of parents, teachers, and God.

Amish attitudes toward life limit the scope of education. Amish children are educated primarily to insure their future success as members of Amish society. The teaching of the 3 R's, while necessary, is secondary in nature but still the responsibility of the parents. (Hostetler 1980)

Newcomb (1980 a.) realized the importance of this task and advised parents to help their children succeed in their scholarly pursuits. Martineau and MacQueen reported a gradual change in occupational areas in Pennsylvania which may broaden the scope of Amish education in the future.

Although Amish society agrees on the importance and function of education, there is some disagreement in educational methods to be used. The focus of education is different in

public schools and Amish parochial schools. The Amish schools stress memorization and accuracy. They help the child realize his position in the Amish community as a supportive member of a cohesive group. On the other hand, the goal of the public school is an educated individual who functions independently of others. Public schools offer a more varied curricula and speed in learning is stressed to a greater degree. (Huntington 1969)

Wittmer (1972 and 1974) and Buchanan (1969) documented the conflicting attitudes of Amish men and school officials regarding educational methods and goals. Willems (1967) stated that the Amish are too culturally different to remain in the public school system. Keefer maintained that the Amish support a public school system that is rural in nature as long as it does not depart much from the Amish life style. Bontrager and Stoll (1965) stated that the Amish need to establish their own schools if they are to rear a new generation of Amish children. The conflict between these viewpoints continues.

Indiana seems to have settled the Amish controversy temporarily. Wittmer (1971) reported an agreement between Amish that allows the Amish to operate parochial schools taught by uncertified teachers if the teachers have passed a General Educational Development Test. The Amish have agreed to state approved attendance and curriculum requirements. A vocational program has been implemented for students after 8th grade and until age 16. It seems the controversy has been settled satisfactorily in Indiana.

The educational attainment of Amish children in parochial schools and public schools seems to be satisfactory. Hostetler and Huntington tested Amish elementary pupils in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics on the SRA Tests. Comparison of composite scores found the Amish to be at the same achievement level as the non-Amish. However, in the language section of the test, the Amish pupils were significantly lower than the non-Amish. The researchers also administered Iowa Basic Skills Tests and found that although the Amish scored lower in vocabulary they surpassed the non-Amish in spelling, word usage, and arithmetic.

Wayne E. Miller also researched Amish academic achievement. Miller's findings echoed the results of Hostetler and Huntington's study. He found that the performances of Amish pupils were comparable with non-Amish pupils in reading comprehension and the use of reference materials but that the Amish vocabulary scores were significantly lower than those of the non-Amish. In the areas of spelling, word usage, and arithmetic problem solving the Amish students yielded higher scores than the non-Amish. Miller attributed the lower vocabulary scores of the Amish to their bilingualism.

Research done by Calvin Redekop indicates different results. Redekop tested 8th grade Amish and non-Amish pupils using the Stanford Achievement Test. Areas tested were the same as in the previously mentioned studies but science, social science, arithmetic conceptualization, and application were

also tested. Results indicated that the Amish scored as well as the non-Amish in all areas tested and surpassed the non-Amish students in the areas of vocabulary and language achievement.

Entwisle researched the development of semantic systems of three culturally different groups. She studied Old Order Amish children, inner city children, and suburban children expecting to find cultural handicaps among the Old Order Amish. However, the research reported the Amish pupils' performance to be on the same performance level as the suburban pupils.

Newcomb (1980 b.) cautioned educators to make sure young Amish students understood directions on standardized tests because of their limited exposure to the English language and standardized tests. Engle and Wittmer (1974) also reported that Amish pupils are more submissive and introverted and might require more extensive guidance than non-Amish children.

CONCLUSIONS

Education is extremely important to the Amish. However, the focus and scope of education is different in Amish society. The Amish limit the scope of practical application in life. Any other purpose for education is unnecessary.

The Amish prefer sending their children to parochial schools to learn the 3 R's--reading, writing and arithmetic. Because these schools are taught by uncertified Amish teachers and not open to outsiders, the Amish can uphold Christian morals and teach the curriculum they deem important without secular influence. However, if parochial schools are unavailable, the Amish will send their children to public schools and attempt to counter the worldly influence.

Amish schools are successful by worldly standards. Although curriculum is not as varied, educational achievement is on a level that parallels this achievement in non-Amish schools. Research dealing with standardized test scores shows that Amish pupils perform at the same level as their public school peers except in the area of vocabulary scores. Other research results state that the Amish scored higher than the non-Amish in the vocabulary area. Although research does not confirm the lack of interest in the arts and sciences, this attitude seems to be encouraged by Amish society.

Although bilingualism affects the academic achievement of Amish pupils negatively, the handicap appears to diminish as education progresses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Extensive language arts programs be developed in the public schools to accelerate vocabulary and verbal skills in the primary grades.
2. Teachers of the Amish in the public schools should familiarize themselves with the Amish culture.
3. Teachers should stress the practical application of skills taught to Amish pupils in the elementary and junior high schools.

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South Bend, Indiana

EXPERIENCE:

Substitute Teacher
Elkhart Community Schools
Elkhart, Indiana
1976-1979

Second Grade Teacher, 1979-1982
Fourth Grade Teacher, 1982-1983
Westview School Corporation
Topeka, Indiana

RATIONALE:

This topic was chosen because of the sizable number of Amish students at my elementary school in Shipshewana. After working with these students on the second and fourth grade levels and seeing the attitude change taking place gradually, this study was undertaken to examine the problem more thoroughly.